

# **Backgrounder *Supporting our Athletes***

February 3, 2010

Canada has never won an Olympic gold medal on our own soil. In all likelihood, this reality will change this year due to the efforts of the **Own The Podium (OTP)**. Own The Podium was created in 2004 and is an unprecedented collaboration between Canada's 13 winter national sport organizations (NSOs), the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), the Calgary Olympic Development Association (CODA), Sport Canada and the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC).

In the past, funding and leadership in the Canadian high performance sport sector has been fractured and fragmented. OTP has brought clarity, vision and accountability along with targeted and efficiently deployed financial resources to the high performance realm leading to unprecedented levels of success for Canadian athletes.

Support for our athletes is a shared responsibility. To date, OTP has enjoyed all party support both inside and outside of Parliament. Currently, the Winter component of Own The Podium invests approximately \$29 million/year in our Winter athletes, their coaches and trainers. Without renewed investment from the federal government, however, this number will drop to \$10m on April 1, 2010, immediately following the Games leading to **significant layoffs of coaches, trainers and sport scientists across Canada. It will also mean less direct financial support for our athletes many of whom already live at or below the poverty line.**

The Federal government needs to send a clear signal to our athletes about their future in Canada. Prime Minister Harper prorogued parliament so Canadians can focus on the Games, however, it will be increasingly difficult for our athletes to focus on delivering gold without a clear signal about their future and the future of high performance sport in Canada after the Olympics.

Already, some of our national high performance training centres are sending pink slips to key technical and medical support staff right before the Olympics. The Canadian Sport Centre in Calgary recently gave pink slips to 39 of their employees signalling that their employment will not be renewed on April 1, 2010.

We all want our athletes to succeed. To do so, however, they need to be able to give 100% of their time and focus on the task at hand – competing with honour – without worrying about their future immediately following the games.

The federal government and Minister Lunn must show leadership. We are asking our athletes to make Canada proud, it is time for us to do right by our athletes. We need:

- A clear direction for high performance sport in Canada following the 2010 Olympics;
- New national goals to lead our high performance system post-Olympics; and
- A clear signal on funding to continue the work of Own the Podium.

Our Olympic Games must be more than just a photo-op for Ministers. Without these signals it will be clear to the sport sector and Canadians that the Federal government is only interested in using our athletes and their Olympic dreams for their own partisan gain rather than seizing this moment to make a meaningful investment in a sustainable high performance system for a healthy Canada.

### **Months of Inaction**

In the Summer of 2009, the federal Minister of State for Sport, Gary Lunn, struck a panel specifically to look at the future of high performance sport in Canada. The mandate of this non-partisan panel, lead by **David Zussman**, Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management at the University of Ottawa, was to:

*look at the successful elements of **Own the Podium** and other related high performance initiatives; to explore options for the innovation and continuation of targeted high performance programs for the future, and to make recommendations that will build on the positive momentum that is felt in Canadian sport today.*

The panel engaged sport leaders from across Canada through five roundtables and receiving more than 30 submissions representing the best thinking of over one hundred sports organizations and leaders from across Canada. More information on the outcomes of the panel's deliberations can be found at:

[http://www.sirc.ca/2010beyond\\_form.cfm](http://www.sirc.ca/2010beyond_form.cfm)

In October, the panel submitted its report to the Minister who has yet to make public or act on its recommendations. Although the recommendations in the report have not been made public, the views of sport leaders as expressed in their submissions are clear, (as summarized in the Key Findings from the Calgary roundtable):

- There is strong support for a continued OTP approach to High Performance.
- There is strong support for targeting of High Performance resources (consistent with an OTP approach).
- There is virtually unanimous support for a central independent, one-window body to co-ordinate and lead High Performance sport.

## Background - Links

### ***Toronto Star***

“Minister Lunn: The Time for Action is Now”

<http://thestar.blogs.com/olympics/2010/02/>

### ***Vancouver Sun***

“Dramatic cuts to sport expected after Olympics”

<http://www.vancouversun.com/sports/2010wintergames/Sport+trainers+told+start+looking+work+nine+days+before+Olympics/2516472/story.html>

### ***Calgary Herald***

“Top sport trainers told to start looking for work”

<http://www2.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/story.html?id=41bfff13-0631-4acb-b1d2-b54d9f62c881>

## **Quotes from The 2010 and Beyond Panel submissions:**

### **Canadian Sport Centres**

*In the recent past, our new approach (i.e., more and better support for athletes and coaches, increased interest and profile for sport, improved and consistent results, new investments etc.) has allowed Canadians to assume a position of prominence among top sport countries. The contribution of sport to Canada and Canadians is widely known.*

*Through unprecedented investments from public and corporate sectors and the technical leadership provided by Own the Podium (OTP), Canada has steadily improved its international presence on the podium in both winter and summer sports since 2005. We recognize that the improvement has been a result of several factors (i.e., targeting, expertise, long term (5 year) commitment to people) which also includes a higher investment level in winter sport.*

### **The Summer Sport Caucus**

*The past 10 years have seen the beginnings of a better way for sport in Canada, including ... Own the Podium (OTP) that supports Canadian athletes and coaches in their pursuit of excellence. Our opportunity as a country is to build on this success and to create the world's best sport leadership strategy and system for our athletes.*

*In the short term, Canadian sport is on track for 2010 and preparing for what's to follow, a path from the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi to the 2011 Pan Am Games in Guadalajara and on to the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics in London with many world championship events in between. Staying on track and meeting our short terms goals is critical.*